Chakma-Mizo Relations During British Rule

Paritosh Chakma

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this book to my wife, Niru, who shared my joy as well as pain during the process of conducting research and writing. Without her support, I would not have achieved this much.

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PREFACE

THE CONTOURS of academic discourse relating to the Chakma-Mizo relations or connections are not only confusing but also often misleading. A lot has been written about the Chakma and Mizo communities separately but not them together to understand their social, political and economic relationships or connections of the past. As a result, the connections between these two principal hill tribes whom the British feared as well as adored and the dept of those connections have remained unknown to this day. The presumption that these two hill communities, who are immediate neighoburs in the western frontiers of Mizoram and in several pockets of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, have had no friendly relations in the past has shaped the unhealthy narrative of the present in more ways than one.

Chakma-Mizo Relations During British Rule

Chakmas and Mizos had a chequered history. They were both allies and competitors for land and resources at the same time. And, their fates seem to have got intertwined by the arrival of the British and colonization of their territories. Following annexation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860, the British tried to run the administration by weakening the three paramount Chiefs or Rajas – Chakma, Bohmong and Mong. On the other hand, frequent and daredevil raids perpetrated by different Lushai chiefs in the British held territories of Cachar, Hill Tipperah, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts, brought them into direct conflict with the British. It was the socalled desire of the British Government to end such raids that led to military expeditions into the Lushai Hills and subsequent colonization of the Lushai country. The British colonized the Lushais through the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the three Rajas there including the Chakma Raja played small parts, by free will or under coercion, in the subjugation of the Lushais.

Evidences are available to show that the Chakma Rajas had enjoyed good friendship with the nearby Kuki Chiefs two hundred fifty years ago from today. Without such a friendship the Kukis would not have come to the aid of the Chakmas to fight the British forces to protect the Chakma sovereignty in around 1776 AD. Why were the Kukis readily sacrificing their lives for the Chakmas? Their relationship must have been special.

Half-a-century later, the Chakmas and the Kukis/Lushais continued to be allies in military forays. In 1830 AD "the Chuckmahs joined with the Zadeng and the Sailos in an attack on Purbura," a powerful Pallian Chief and destroyed his large village at Pukzing, in present day Mamit district of Mizoram. Their partnership in military pursuits made Lt-Colonel J. Shakespear, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills to remark that "These Kukis were allies of the Chuckmahs (= Chakmas)".[1]

Throughout the recorded history, the Chakmas and the Kukis/Lushais had been partners in trade and commerce, as to survive in the hostile topography they lived in, they needed each other's helping hands. Their social and business contacts went on as usual despite some hostilities by a few distant Kuki chiefs who created troubles in the Chakma territory.

As to how old are these contacts it is difficult to convincingly tell. This small researched study is an attempt to understand and appreciate the diverse relationships that existed between Chakmas and Mizos during the British rule and their intricacies.

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1. Lt-Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, Macmillan and Co. Limited, London, 1912, p.5

CHAPTER 1

STRANGERS OR COMPETITORS?

1

THE ACADEMIC and political discourse that is currently prevalent that the Chakmas and the Mizos had first come into contacts during the Lushai Expedition of 1871-72, or the very narrative that the Chakma coolies had set foot into Mizo soil for the first time during this military expedition, is totally incorrect and absurd. Such a claim, mostly expounded by some Mizoram historians, tries to project the Chakmas and the Mizos as strangers throughout the recorded history, whereas the fact is otherwise. A lot of credible historical information or events are available to demolish this *political* commentary on Chakma-Mizo

connection.

The social and political intercourse of the Chakmas with the Kukis, who are precursors of the modern Mizos, is ancient. The early 17th century Buddhist scholar, Taranatha in *History of Buddhism in India* claims that "Cak-ma" situated somewhere near Arakan and Pegu (Burma) was one of the "Ko-ki countries" and Buddhism was spread to the "Ko-ki" lands by Samrat Ashoka.[2] The "Kuki" of the Lushai Hills may have derived their ancient name from "Ko-ki" nation. Although it is yet unclear how the Chakma country was under the Kuki domination, or was one of the constituents of the Kuki country, what establishes is the ancient relationship of some kind that existed between the Chakmas and the Kukis. Hence, they cannot be strangers as they are often made out to be.

The most astonishing thing that happened in history of North-east India but has gone unnoticed is the guerilla war which the Chakma and Kuki warriors fought together against the imperialist British forces in 1776 AD. This war, which can be termed as 'First Anglo-Chakma War', was fought from 1772 to 1798 under three Chakma kings to protect the sovereignty of the Chakma kingdom. The Kukis had joined this war at the invitation of the Chakma Raja, Sher Daulat Khan and

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2. Debiprasad Chattopadhyaya ed., *Taranatha's History of Buddhism in India*, reprint 1990, p.330

his military commander Ranu Khan Dewan. Official British accounts recorded that Ranu Khan Dewan called to his aid "*large bodies of Kukimen, who live far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not the use of fire arms and who go unclothed.*"[3] While the civilizational backwardness of the Kukis may have been overstated by the British officials who had suffered from racial superiority complex, the statement proved that friendly relations had existed between the Chakma and Kuki Rajas of that time. Unless this was the case, the Kukis, who were dreaded for their ferocity, would never descent upon the Chittagong Hill Tracts to sacrifice their lives to protect the Chakma kingdom.

Other contemporary accounts of that period also suggested that the Chakma Raja had enjoyed good relations with most neighbouring Kuki Chiefs and many in that. But the problem was that in the course of migrations often due to incessant infightings among the Kuki Chiefs, one Chief was succeeded by the other whom the Chakma Raja found difficult to establish contacts that quickly, and hence, resulted in atrocities by the Kukis under the new Chiefs. In 1799 John Macrae, an official of the East India Company stated, "*Though the Rajah (= Chakma Raja) is upon terms of friendship with some of the tribes (= Kukis), yet, in the course of*

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3. R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Pioneer Press, Allahabad, 1909, p.8

their migrations, these are succeeded by others that he knows nothing of, and of whose approach even he is ignorant until his people are cut off; he is, therefore, under the necessity of being constantly prepared to repel these attacks, which, from being always made in the night, it is impossible to guard against."[4]

There are some more examples of this ancient relationship. The Kukis/Lushais during the British period used to refer the Chakmas as "Tui-Thek".[5] This name was derived ever since the Kukis found the Chakmas dwelling on the river banks of Sajek, Tuichawng, Karnaphuli, Thega and Harina in the western frontiers of present-day Mizoram. In Zo language 'Tui' means "water" and 'Thek' is the name given to the Chakmas in the Chin hills and Arakan hills from a very ancient time. The literal meaning of "Tui-Thek" therefore is "people living near water/rivers". When members of the Mara tribe, formerly known as Lakher, first met a Chakma, they also met him in the river collecting water snails (Saamuk in Chakma, Chengkawl in Mizo) which is a delicacy in most tribal households and therefore the Maras named the Chakma as "Takangpa". N.E. Parry, a former Superintendent of Lushai Hills, claims in his famed book "The Lakhers": "*The first Chakma seen by the*

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4. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas, Asiatic Researches, Volume 7*, Cosmo Publications, New Delhi, reprint 1979, p.197

5. Willem van Schendel ed., *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798)*, University Press Limited, Bangladesh, 1992, p.54

Lakhers was standing on the bank of a river breaking water snail's shells, and the name is derived from the noise made by the shells breaking."[6] The reference of the Chakmas as "Tui-Thek" strongly suggests that the Chakmas had been well-known to the Kukis in the Chin hills or Arakan prior to the migration of the Kukis to the Lushai Hills. The Census of Burma 1881 gives credence to this when it recorded a curious phenomenon that "*The Daingnets (i.e. Chakmas of Arakan) are decreasing in numbers, an indication that they are gradually ceasing to exist as a separate tribe and are being absorbed into the general Chin community.*"[7] This would clearly mean that many Chakma members were absorbed into the ethnicity of the Chins who are none other than the Mizos/Lushais.

2

WHEN the British annexed the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860 AD and established direct rule over Chakma and Bohmong Rajas, the invaders also came closest to the independent tribes belonging to the larger *Zo* family living further east in the then unexplored Lushai Hills. At that time, the northern parts of the Lushai Hills were ruled by chiefs belonging to the Sailo clan of

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6. N. E. Parry, *The Lakhers*, MacMillan and Co. Limited, St. Martin's Street, London, 1932, p.574

7. R. B. Smart, *Burma Gazetteer Akyab District, Vol. A*, Rangoon, 1917, p. 94

the Lushais while the country south of Lungleh was inhabited chiefly by the 'Lakher' (Mara) and the Lai tribes who were collectively called as Shendus by the British.[8] Lushai chief Rutton Poia had his village nearest to the Chittagong Hill Tracts at Demagiri. In 1861, a military expedition led by Captain Raban was undertaken to punish this chief for his role in the barbaric raids perpetrated upon the British subjects in the plains of British district of Tipperah.

The British documented the Lushai Hills as a land occupied by immigrants. In the words of Lt Colonel J. Shakespeare, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills: "*Among inhabitants of the Lushai Hills are found a very considerable number of immigrants, or descendants of immigrants from the Chin Hills, who are found living among the Lushais under the Thangur Chiefs or in villages under their own chiefs.*"[9] The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 16, published in 1908, describes migration into the Lushai Hills in the following words: *"The history of the Lushai Hills, as far as known, is the history of a backwash or eddy of the great wave of immigration that is generally believed to have started from North-West China and spread over Assam and southwards towards the sea. In the Lushai Hills the movement for the last hundred years has been northwards; and at the beginning of the nineteenth century certain tribes, known as the Old Kukis, were driven from*

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8. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, Calcutta, 1906, p.5

9. Lt Colonel J Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p. XIV

this country, and finding no safety in the plains of Cachar, settled in the hills to the north of the Surma Valley. Fifty years later there was another immigration of hillmen, called New Kukis to distinguish them from their predecessors, who were driven from the southern hills by the Lushais, who made their first appearance on the Chatachara range [in the north Lushai Hills, bordering Cachar, Assam] in 1840."[10]

Even the Mizoram Government accepts the immigration theory. Regarding the origin and migration of the Mizo tribes the Mizoram Government has this to say: "*The origin of the Mizos, like those of many other tribes in the North Eastern India is shrouded in mystery. The generally accepted as part of a great Mongoloid wave of migration from China and later moved out to India to their present habitat. It is possible that the Mizos came from Shinlung or Chhinlungsan located on the banks of the river Yalung in China. They first settled in the Shan State and moved on to Kabaw Valley to Khampat and then to the Chin Hills in the middle of the 16th century. The earliest Mizos who migrated to India were known as Kukis, the second batch of immigrants were called New Kukis. The Lushais were the last of the Mizo tribes migrate to India.*"[11]

There is no disagreement among historians and scholars that the Kuki settlement in Mizoram is older

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[10]. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 16*, p.214

[11]. Website of Government of Mizoram, source link: https://mizoram.nic.in/about/history.htm (accessed on 28 April 2021)

than that of the Lushais/Mizos. The earliest Kukis namely Rangkols and Betes are said to have inhabited the country now called Mizoram about the middle of the sixteenth century. Later they were driven out to the North Cachar Hills and Manipur by the New Kukis namely Jansens and Tadois who were in turn driven out of the Lushais Hills towards Cachar by the Lushais and this second exodus took place about the earlier part of the nineteenth century.[12] Census of India, 1901 stated, "*The word 'Kuki' has been applied to the various tribes that have at different times occupied the Lushai Hills, and have been driven northwards by successive waves of emigration from the east and south. The Rangkhols and Betes were the first to move on to the plains, and to them is applied the term 'Old Kuki', while their successors, the Thadois and Jangshens, who were in their turn driven out by the Lushais, are styled New Kukis'; though the use of the latter term is to be deprecated as suggesting a connection between the Rangkhols and Jangshens which does not exist.*"[13]

In *The Lushei Kuki Clans* (1912), Lt. Colonel Shakespear stated that Old Kukis including Biate (Beteh) and Hrangchul (Rangkol) and other cognate clans known as Khawtlang were driven out to Cachar plains about the end of the eighteenth century by their successors,

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12. C.A. Soppitt, *A Short Account of the Kuki-Lushai Tribes on the North-East Frontier*, Firma KLM Pvt Ltd, reprint 1976, pp.7-8

13. *Census of India, 1901, Vol. IV, Assam, Part I- Report*, p.90

the Thados, Sukte, Paihte, and cognate clans who established themselves firmly in the north and who came to be known as "New Kuki". The highly organized Thados were vanquished by the Sailo chiefs and this led in the ejection of the New Kukis into Silchar about 1848.[14]

Anthony Gilchrist McCall, another Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, opines that the strong Sailo migration commenced in about 1780 AD moving from the south in a northerly direction driving before them the Hrangkol, Biate, Thado and other kindred tribes until the Sailos, with their Lushai clans, in 1810, chiefly under Lallula Sailo, had consolidated their internal position "*by occupying most of the country between Champai and Demagri northwards up to the borders of Cachar and Sylhet.*"[15] According to Lt. Colonel Shakespear, Thangura, who lived early in the eighteenth century at Tlangkua, north of Falam (Burma), was the ancestor of all the Lushei chiefs. From him sprang six lines of Thangur clans namely Rokum, Zadeng, Thangluah, Pallian, Rivung, and Sailo.[16] Among these six Thangur clans the Thangluah and Rivung went to the south-west and Rivung chief penetrated into the Chittagong Hill tracts, and a chief of this clan named Vanhnuai-

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14. Lt Colonel J Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.6

15. Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, Firma KLM Private Ltd, Calcutta, reprint 1977, pp.35-36

16. Lt Colonel J Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.3

Thanga had a very large village on the Longteroi hill, between the Chengri and Kassalong rivers. This chief died about 1850 and his village was destroyed by Vutaia. The remnant of the Rivungs fled to Hill Tipperah. The Thangluah clan penetrated as far as Demagiri and Barkal, where Rutton poia (modern name Rothangpuia) ruled till his death in 1875. Rutton Poia's son Lalchheva, fretting at the British control, moved his village further east from Demagiri and his village was totally destroyed by Hausata, a Chin chief.[17]

Hence, there is general agreement that the Kukis were replaced by the Sailo tribes who became the lord of the North Lushai Hills. Prior to the arrival of the Sailos, the Kukis had ejected the Chakmas from their homeland in the western and south-western belt of Mizoram and pushed them beyond the Barkal in South Lushai Hills and beyond Sajek river in the North Lushai Hills to join their clan in what is now known as the Chittagong Hill Tracts. This ejection of the Chakmas by the Kukis probably took place in the latter half of the 18th century and continued by the Lushais (Mizos) during the early 19th century. The hostilities were over jhum land and establishing lordship over territories and militarily superior Kukis instilled fear and havoc as they marched westwards making the Chakmas and other smaller tribes flee for their lives.

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17. ibid, p.4

The Kukis and their successors the Lushais were well-known for their ferocity and head-hunting practices. Alexander Mackenzie's book, *The North-East Frontier of India,* is full of details about the Kuki raids in the plains of Cachar, Tripura, Sylhet, Manipur, Chittagong plains and CHT. In a 1853 report, Colonel Lister stated about the Kukis, "*They used to come down and attack the villages in the plains, massacre the inhabitants, take their heads, loot and burn their houses. These aggressions used principally to be made after the dead of one of their Kookie Rajahs, when the having human heads to bury with him is in the idea of the Kookie a matter of great consideration.*"[18]

In consequence of the aggressions made by the Kukis in the Chittagong frontiers, the Chakmas inhabiting in the western and south-western parts of present-day Mizoram had to desert their villages and jhums and moved into the present-territory of the Chittagong Hill Tracts where the Chakmas were the dominant community. The process of dislodging of the Chakmas by the Kukis and then by the Lushais continued both during and after the conquest of the Chittagong Hill Tracts by the British. In 1798, Dr Francis Buchanan, who was tasked by the East India Company to tour the CHTs, recorded that "*They (= Chakmas) frequently change their places of abode …owing chiefly to the incursions of a very savage people called Koongkies, who live at a great distance, but*

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[18]. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, Mittal Publications, New Delhi, reprint 1995, p.287

who frequently make attacks on the inhabitants of the hills."[19] Even the Chakma Raja had to abandon his house at some places due to incursions by the Kukis. According to Dr Buchanan, the Chakma Raja had frequently lived at Dungata, a place far up the Cheemay river (also called Chingay or Chingree), until he and his people deserted the place in 1793 on account of attacks by the Kukis. But his two Dewans named Petan and Seram continued to manage affairs in that part of the northern territory on behalf of the Chakma king.[20]

Around the same period, another official of the East India Company, John Macrae in his 1799 article on Kookies (Kukis) gave evidence that confirms Dr Buchanan's account of the events. John Macrae states, "*They (= Kookies) stand so greatly in awe of fire-arms, that the report of a single musket will put a whole party to flight; on this account the Rajah of the Choomeeas (= Chakmas), who is so immediately in their neighbourhood, keeps in his service a number of Pehluwans, or men with fire-arms; but, notwithstanding, his people have been obliged to abandon several places, by the depredations committed by the Kookies.*"[21]

Dr Buchanan found Chakmas jhuming the fertile

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19. Willem van Schendel ed., *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798)*, p.16

20. ibid, p.119

21. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas*, Asiatic Researches, Volume 7, p.197

forests of the Barcal (Barkal)[22] but they were afraid to go further upwards the Karnafuli river due to fear of the Koongkies/Kungkis (=Kukis).[23] Barkal (now in Bangladesh) is some miles downstream of the Karnaphuli from Demagiri. Although some Kukis had penetrated as far as the Chittagong hills and occupied many hills that hitherto belonged to the Chakma Raja, these Chittagong Kukies continued to be tributaries to the Chakma Raja.[24] In 1798, Dr Buchanan recorded that "*The country, however, between the Chingay and Rampahar, is occupied by Kungkis, subject more or less to the Saksah (=Chakma) chief.*"[25] He further noted that "*Several villages, however, both of Tripuras and Kungkis, in a state of personal freedom, live in the territory of the Saksah chief, and subject to his authority.*"[26]

The exodus of the Chakmas continued till the subjugation of the Lushais by the British at the end of the nineteenth century. The Census of India, 1891 recorded that some 156 families including Chakma,

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22. Willem van Schendel ed., *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798)*, p.114

23. ibid, p.117

24. ibid, p.107

25. Francis Hamilton Buchanan, *An Account of the Frontier between Ava and the Part of Bengal adjacent to the Karnaphuli river,* The Edinburgh Journal of Science, Vol. III, No. V (1825), p.42

26. ibid, p.38

Pankhoo and Banjugi fled from the head-quarters Khas Mehal (i.e. Demagiri areas) and some 300 Chakma families from the Upper Chengri Valley, or Mong Raja's Circle, and returned to the Chakma Circle in consequence of the Lushai raids.[27] About 200 Riang families also fled the head-quarters Khas Mehal to Hill Tipperah due to fear of Lushai raids.[28] Thus, it was not only Chakmas but also Riangs and other smaller tribes Pankhoo and Banjugi who got dislodged by the Lushais from the Demagiri areas as late as 1891.

The Chakmas had to vacate a large swath of land in the western and south-western belt of the Lushai Hills due to the Kuki-Lushai incursions. Pointing to this, Deputy Commissioner of CHT Captain T.H. Lewin in his famed book, *A fly on the Wheel,* stated: "*These Lushais were the standing problem which embarrassed all local administration; they continually raided into the Hill Tracts, attacking and plundering the inhabitants, burning the villages, slaying the men, and carrying off the women and children into slavery. This had gone on for years, until the fear of these inroads had at last established a broad tract of depopulated and deserted country, lying like a zone between us and the Lushais, extending from north to south in a breadth of perhaps fifty miles.*"[29] Alexander Mackenzie also testified that "*the frontier was*

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27. *Census of India 1891, Volume III*, pp.82-83

28. ibid, p.83

29 . TH Lewin, *A Fly on The Wheel or How I helped To Govern India*, London, 1912, pp.189-190

in a state of constant panic: large tract of the country were deserted by the Joomea cultivators, and it seemed as if nothing that our police and troops could effect would secure them from attack."[30] This vast tract of depopulated and deserted country was formerly inhabited by the indigenous Chakmas. The Chakma Raja had to cede this vast area in the east due to the Kuki-Lushai incursions.

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30. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.345

CHAPTER 2

"THESE KUKIS WERE ALLIES OF THE CHUCKMAHS"

IN BOTH military and commerce, the Chakmas and the Kukis/Lushais continued to be formidable allies, notwithstanding troubles created by some distant Kuki Chiefs in the Chittagong Hill Tracts including the Chakma country. Their partnership in military pursuits made Lt-Colonel J. Shakespear, Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, remark that "These Kukis were allies of the Chuckmahs (=Chakmas)". He recorded that in 1830 AD "the Chuckmahs joined with the Zadeng and the Sailos in an attack on Purbura."[31] Purbura was a very powerful Pallian chief whose large village at Pukzing in present day Mamit district of Mizoram was

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31. Lt-Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.7

destroyed by a combined force of Zadeng, Sailo, and Chakma fighters. Purbura rebuilt his village, but died soon after.[32] Later the Zadengs were defeated by Mangpura Sailo, the son of the great Lallula Sailo, chief leader of the Sailo migration. The Zadengs were totally routed and the last Zadeng chief who ruled independently died in 1857 at Chengpui near Lunglei.[33] Thereafter, the Sailos ruled supreme in the North Lushai Hills.

Thirty years later, history witnessed another collaboration between the Lushais and the Chakmas. In the "Great Kookie Invasion" of 1860, the followers of Rutton Poia clans on 31 January 1860 burnt or plundered 15 villages, butchered 185 British subjects, and carried off about 100 slaves in the plains of Tipperah District.[34] This particular attack was instigated by some Thakur refugees from Hill Tipperah who had lived for some time among the Kukis and who took advantage of the ill-feeling caused by an attack made by the Tipperah Raja's subjects upon some Duptung Kukis. The real target was the villages of the Tipperah Raja but for some reasons got diverted to British territory. The Reangs and the Chakmas who were disgruntled with the Tipperah Rajah also took

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32. ibid, p.5

33. Anthony Gilchrist McCall, *Lushai Chrysalis*, P.37

34. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.342

part with the Kukis to plunder the villages.[35]

However, the Chakma-Kuki joint military ventures were much older. After the Chittagong fell into the hands of the East India Company in 1760, they found two tribal rulers in the Chittagong Hill Tracts namely Chakma Raja Jan Buksh Khan and Bohmong Raja Chowdry Kumla Phroo,[36] the Chakma territory being much larger. In 1763, Harry Verelst, the first chief of Chittagong, issued a proclamation demarcating the jurisdiction of then Chakma Raja Shermust Khan as "*All the hills from the Pheni river to the Sangu, and from Nizampur Road to the hills of the Kuki Raja.*"[37] Hence, the Chakma kingdom had shared its eastern borders with the Kuki Raja. Although the Chakma Raja continued to pay cotton tribute to the East India Company, trouble started after Warren Hastings became Governor of Bengal in 1772.[38] Suniti Bhushan Qanungo opines that "*The hill kingdom of the Chakmas became target of the expansionist policy of the Chittagong authorities. Rangunia which was situated adjoining the Regulation District of Chittagong was made an object of British*

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35. ibid, p.343

36. *The Calcutta Review, Vol. 49*, p.162

37. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.24

38. H.H. Dodwell ed., *The Cambridge History of British Empire, Vol. IV*, Cambridge, 1929, p.205

policy of expansion."[39] As Charles Bentley, the Collector of Chittagong, demanded 501 mounds of cotton, instead of 11 mounds as usually paid, from Ranu Khan, the Chakma dewan of Rangunia, and appointed one Durgaram Chowdhury as the chakladar of Rangunia,[40] the Chakma Raja, Sher Daulat Khan (1765-1782) rose in rebellion in 1772 to protect the sovereignty of his kingdom.[41] However, this "Chakma Uprising" (also called First Anglo-Chakma War) was taken seriously by the British only in 1776. "In 1776 Sher Daulat Khan withheld the revenue and his general Ronu Khan began to plunder shops at Rangonea. The authorities attempted his capture between 1777 and 1780 but without success," recorded R.H.S. Hutchinson, Superintendent of the CHTs.[42] Official British accounts state that Ranu Khan Dewan called to his aid "*large bodies of Kukimen, who live far in the interior parts of the hills, who have not the use of fire arms and who go unclothed.*"[43] Chakma and Kuki army were successful in repulsing the more sophisticated British army. Eventually, Raja Jan Baksh Khan, the son of Sher Daulat, following

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39. Suniti Bhushan Qanungo, *Chakma Resistance to British Domination 1772-1798*, Chittagong, 1998, p.30

40. ibid, p.32

41. ibid, p.40

42. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.92

43. ibid, p.8

protracted guerilla war entered into a peace agreement with Governor General Lord Cornwallis at Calcutta in February 1787. But the guerilla war ended only in 1798 and the British since then had an upper hand that shaped the destiny for both Chakmas and Lushais (Mizos).

The British started to interfere into the internal matters of the Chakma administration and eventually colonized the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860 by the Act XXII of 1860. While the actual motive was pacification of Chakma female ruler, Kalindi Rani, the official reason given by the British government was to prevent raids by the Kuki/Lushai chiefs into British territories. In a report submitted by the Superintendent of Police of Chittagong in 1854 it was stated that in the last seventeen years there had been nineteen raids in which 107 were killed, 15 injured and 186 persons were carried away by the raiders who came from the Lushai Hills.[44] "*The primary object of the appointment of a Hill Superintendent was the supervision of the independent tribes; and for the next few years attention was principally directed to the preservation of the peace of the frontier*," wrote Captain Lewin in 1869.[45]

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44. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.338

45. TH Lewin, *The Hill Tracts of Chittagong and the Dwellers Therein*, Calcutta, 1869, p.23

But there is no evidence that any of the Rajas (Chakma and Bohmong) of the Chittagong Hill Tracts had ever asked for protection from the British against the Lushais.

CHAPTER 3

(MIS)USE OF LUSHAIS FOR POLITICAL ENDS

1

TALES OF Chakma-Mizo relations get quite fascinating with some accounts claiming that the powerful Chakma female ruler, Kalindi Rani (ruled from 1832-1873) and her Dewans had used the Kukis/Lushais for their pursuits of political power and authority and to settle personal scores.

Dewans were traditionally responsible for carrying out the administration on behalf of the Chakma Raja and collected taxes in their own jurisdictions as per directions of the Raja. In power and prestige they were second only to the Raja and their influence over the

people can be gauged from Dr. Buchanan's description during his tour of the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1798:

> "This village at the mouth of the Basunta (Near Rangamati) is pretty large, contain[in]g above 50 houses, and is extremely populous. It is one of the fixed residences of the Chakmas, under the administration of a Dewan. ... The Chakma villages derive their name from the *Dewan*, under whose authority they are, and must therefore frequently change their appellation."[46]

While the Dewans in general were loyal to their Raja through thick and thin, the unease in the relations between the Raja and his Dewans could be felt during the reign of Dharam Baksh Khan, husband of Kalindi Rani. Wrote Hutchinson, "*This Chief [Dharam Baksh] finding the influence of the Dewans somewhat irksome, tried to lessen it by creating several additional Dewans, and he was to a certain extent successful.*" This troubled relationship remained undercurrent during the reign of Kalindi Rani and then exploded for some time changing the history of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and of the Lushai Hills forever.

After the death of Dharam Baksh Khan in 1832 without a son, there had been bitter squabble among his three queens and some relatives, with each wanting

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46. Willem van Schendel ed., *Francis Buchanan in Southeast Bengal (1798)*, p.120

to be the successor. Although Kalindi Rani emerged as the winner through a court judgement in her favour, she continued to face challenges from her influential Dewans.

Scholar Ananda Bikash Chakma quotes a true incident of feud between two powerful Dewans, Girish Chandra Dewan and Trilok Chandra Dewan, both of *Dabana* clan. The feud turned so disastrous that Girish Chandra after learning that his brother-in-law was siding with the rival camp shot him dead. Girish Chandra further invited the Kukis from Lushai Hills to vanquish his rival. Soon, Trilok Chandra's village was attacked by a large party of armed Kukis and he was killed while trying to flee into the jungle. His aggrieved son, Nil Chandra Dewan and other fellow Dewans approached Kalindi Rani with the demand to seek the British help to decimate the Kukis who were responsible for the murder of Trilok Chandra Dewan. Realising the serious consequences of inviting the British interference Kalindi Rani rejected the suggestion, thus inviting the ire of Nil Chandra Dewan.[47] Nil Chandra plotted a rebellion against Kalindi Rani. The Rani retaliated with far-reaching consequences. "To destroy him the Rani called the Kukis and the Lushais to her aid to which Nil Chandra

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47. Ananda Bikash Chakma, *Parbottyo Chattogramer Staniyo Rajader Abhyantorin Nitite Opanibesik Hastokshyep, 1789-1860*, Bangladesh Asiatic Society Journal, Vol. 38, No. 2, December 2020

Dewan's reaction was to invite the British to intervene, thus leading to the Lushai expeditions and gradual extension of their influence in the area," claims Omesh Saigal.[48] The first Lushai expedition was conducted in January 1861, and Saigal must be referring to it.

Lushais' help was also much sought after during the hostilities between the Rajas of the CHT. In the cold season of 1850-51, attacks upon wood-cutters felling bamboos and timber in the jungles near to the Lushai habitations were reported from time to time. The British government suspected that some of these attacks were directly connected to feuds between the Bohmong Raja and Kalindi Rani.[49] It is possible that either of them or both of them were hiring the Kukis to attack each other's subjects.

2

SOON after the Chittagong Hill Tracts was annexed by the British, a Lushai Expedition was carried out to punish Rutton Poia, the nearest Lushai Chief residing near Demagiri who was found to be behind the "Great Kookie Invasion" of January 1860 in which a strong

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48. Omesh Saigal, *Tripura – Its History and Culture*, Concept Publishing Company, pp.108-109

49. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India,* pp.337-338

force of about 400 to 600 Kukis burst into the plains of Tipperah at Chagulneyab, burning and plundering 15 villages, butchering 185 British subjects, and carrying off about 100 slaves.[50] The punitive military campaign was led by Captain Raban, whose troops marched up to the village of Rutton Poia and burnt it down in January 1861.[51] The three Chiefs, Chakma (Kalindi Rani), Bohmong and Mong, provided assistance by way of supplying coolies for the Lushai Expedition which earned them the fury of the Lushai Chiefs and shaped the future relations between the Lushais and the tribes of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, particularly Chakmas and Maghs.

While Rutton Poia tendered total submission before Captain Graham, the British Superintendent of CHT in September 1861 fearing more attacks from the British,[52] the Chiefs living beyond him remained defiant. In September 1862, the chiefs of Howlongs and Syloos sent to Captain Graham a stern message that "*though they had no intention of attacking Europeans, they considered they had a right to cut up other tribes, such as Bengalees, Chuckmas, Tipperahs, and Mughs, and we (=British) had no right to interfere.*"[53] In 1863, Captain

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50. ibid, p.342

51. ibid, p.344

52. ibid, p.345

53. ibid, p.346

Graham managed to sign an agreement with Rutton Poia and nine other chiefs that stated,

> "The Kookies hereby acknowledge all persons of the following descriptions living in the hills and plains to be British subjects, namely, Mughs, Bengalees, Tipperahs, Chuckmas, and such other classes as the Superintendent may from time to time point out."[54]

But such an agreement did not prevent the raids upon the British subjects in the Chittagong Hill Tracts or Assam.

The incident of kidnapping of a six-year-old white European girl, named Mary Winchester, from the tea garden of Alexandrapore in Cachar on 23 January 1871[55] changed the history of the Lushai Hills forever. This kidnapping invited a brutal military expedition which had the following directive from the Government of India: "*It must, however, always be borne in mind that retaliation is not the only object of the expedition. The main end in view is to show these savages that they are completely in our power; to establish friendly relations of a permanent character with them; to make them promise to receive in their villages, from time to time, Native agents of our own; to make traveling in their districts safe to all; to show them the advantages of trade and commerce; and to demonstrate to them effectually*

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54. ibid, p.347

55. ibid, pp.305-306

that they have nothing to gain and everything to lose by placing themselves in a hostile position towards the British Government."[56] Another directive was loud and clear: "*His Excellency in Council does not anticipate any formidable armed resistance to the advance of the troops; but if hostility is met with, resisting villages should be attacked and burnt, and the surrounding crops destroyed.*"[57] Once again the three Chiefs of the Chittagong Hill Tracts were called upon to supply coolies. For the services rendered during the expedition, Kalindi Rani received a deduction of Rs. 1,143 in taxes,[58] (similar remissions were given to the two other Rajas) and her grandson Harish Chandra was vested with the title "Rai Bahadur" and presented a gold watch and a gold chain.[59] This Lushai Expedition of 1871-72 resulted in the rescue of the child Mary Winchester, submission of a number of Lushai Chiefs and establishment of forward post at Demagiri. Another Lushai Expedition was undertaken in 1889 to punish Lushai chiefs Howsata and Jahuta for the

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56. ibid, p.311

57. ibid, p.310

58. Selections from the Correspondence on the Revenue Administration of the Chittagong Hill Tracts 1862-1927, Government of Bengal, Revenue Department, Calcutta, Bengal Government Press, 1929 (hereinafter *Selections*), p.253

59. Narendra S. Bisht, T. S. Bankoti ed., *Encyclopaedic Ethnography of the Himalayan Tribes*, Vol. 1, Global Vision Publishing House, Delhi, p.275

murder of the Lieutenant J.F. Stewart.[60] In this expedition the Demagiri to Lungleh road, a distance of forty one miles, was constructed by over 2,500 Chakma and Bengali coolies. The Chakma Coolies also constructed temporary huts for the accommodation of the troops at different halting places.[61]

Captain Lewin who was posted as Deputy Commissioner of the Chittagong Hill Tracts from 1866 to 1873 became the first white friend of the Mizos, while he continued to face insurmountable resistance from Chakma ruler Kalindi Rani. While Captain Lewin was facing inquiries as a result of complaints lodged by Kalindi Rani with the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal in Calcutta, he received moral support as well as an offer to be the 'Chief' of the Lushais from his friend, Rutton Poia, who sent the following message:

> "The chiefs hear that you are at enmity with the great Lord Sahib in Calcutta. If this be the case, they invite you to come into their country. Each of the chiefs will give you a house from each of their villages, and men will flock to you on account of your being proof against bullets. Come to us, brother. You will be a great chief."[62]

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60. A. Scott Reid, *Chin-Lushai Land,* Thacker, Spink and Co., Calcutta, 1893, p.50

61. ibid, p.51

62. T.H. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel*, p.218

CHAPTER 4

BONDED BY SALT

SALT IS essential to human life. Salt has long been used for flavouring. The human body uses sodium, which comes from salt, to maintain fluid levels. A balance of fluid and sodium is necessary for the health of the heart, liver, and kidneys. In many world cultures, salt has become the symbol of enduring faithfulness and acquired the connotation of high esteem and honour since ancient times. The Arab avowal "There is salt between us," the Hebrew expression "to eat the salt of the palace," the modern Persian phrase *namak ḥarām*, "untrue to salt" (i.e., disloyal or ungrateful), and the English phrase "salt of the earth" (symbolizing a person's honesty and respect), are some of its examples. In the iconic Hindi movie *Sholay*, the dacoit leader Gabbar's man Kaalia tells him, "*Sardar, maine aapka namak khaya hain*" (roughly translated, Boss, I have eaten your salt) to which Gabbar replies, "*Ab goli*

khaa" (Eat the bullet now) and shoots him dead. It depicts betrayal of the loyalty with fatal consequences. While *Sholay* was released in 1975, this scene had played out occasionally between the Chakma traders and the Kuki chiefs more than one century ago in the course of their trade relations.

Salt, for the tribals in the North-eastern frontier of British Bengal, had solemn meanings. Salt symbolized honour, truthfulness and value. Whenever the Kukis and the Chakmas had to send any important message to each other they always put in the hand of the bearer "a small quantity of salt to be delivered with the message as expressive of its importance."[63] If the message is not accompanied by any salt, it was often received with a pinch of salt! The frantic message of the Chakma Raja seeking urgent assistance to fight against the British in 1776 must have been delivered to the Kuki Chiefs with crystal salt through the bearers' hands.

When Khasi chief of Nongkhlow, U Tirot Sing (British spelt as Teerut Sing) wanted to surrender to the British forces he sent his trusted Muntree (minister) Jeet Roy to negotiate with Mr. Inglis, who commanded the post of Oomchillung, on 9 January 1833. Jeet Roy demanded that the life of his master be spared as the

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63. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas*, Asiatic Researches, Volume 7, p.188

only condition for surrender. Mr Inglis agreed and his promise was "ratified by the Khasia oath, of eating salt from the blade of a sabre".[64] U Tirot Singh handed himself over to Mr Inglis on 13 January but not before the British commander had repeated his oath previously taken by eating salt from the blade of a sabre in front of the Khasi king.[65]

The chief produce of the hills of Chittagong Hill Tracts, Lushai Hills and Hill Tipperah were cotton and rice. The cotton was cultivated for the purpose of bartering it for the different necessaries of life with which they required to be furnished from the low countries, such as salt, tobacco, dried-fish, earthen pots, spirituous liquors etc.[66] A number of Bengali *beparees* (traders) would carry those articles into the hills of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and bring down cotton. The Kukis living at greater distance in the inaccessible hills did not have direct access to the *bazars* (markets) of Chittagong and Bengali *beparees* were too afraid to enter the Kuki territories. John Macrae, a surgeon with the East India Company at Chittagong in his 1799 report claimed that the Kukis used to occasionally visit the *haats*, or markets, at Rangunea, seat of the Chakma Raja, near the Chittagong plains to purchase "salt, dried

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64. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.229

65. ibid, p.230

66. ibid, p.281

fish and tobacco."[67] But the number of such visits to access the *haats* would be very scanty due to the distance and hazardous terrain. Hence, the Kukis were highly dependent upon the hill tribes particularly the Chakmas for their supply of salt. The Kukis had many necessities but salt and tobacco topped their priority list.

The Lushai traders further took the salt to Howlong or Syloo villages and exchanged it for four times its weight in rubber.[68]

In 1866, in order to discourage raids by the Lushais, the Bengal Government suggested a plan to regulate the supply of salt. It proposed to ban supply of salt to the Lushais except through the Superintendent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.[69] The British policy to tame the Lushais, however, remained unsuccessful.

Writing in 1912, Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear stated about the increasing needs of the Lushai villagers in the following words: "*Periodically they visit the nearest bazar, often a journey of several days, to purchase salt and the few requisites that their own industry cannot produce, consisting chiefly of brass cooking pots, iron to be made into daos or finished*

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67. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas,* Asiatic Researches, Volume 7, p.183

68. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.433

69. ibid, p.353

daos. Nowadays, it is true, the wants of the people are slowly increasing, and looking-glasses, umbrellas, needles, and Manchester goods are finding their way into the most remote villages."[70]

While John Macrae identified the Kookies as "Luncta, or the naked", he called the tribals of the Chittagong Hills as "Choomeas",[71] but distinctly identified the "Mugs" (Maghs) separately. Hence, we can say that by "Choomeas" he actually meant the Chakmas. The Kukis are said to also have had a good contact with the Magh Raja who lived in the southern parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and they frequently visited him as they somewhat understood their language.[72]

Money was unknown to the Lushai Hills, so the Kukis for whatever they wanted would barter their produce with the Chakmas who were the main medium of commerce. But the Kukis were always suspicious and the Chakmas (or members of any other alien tribes) were never allowed to enter into their villages. The Chakma traders would be always asked to wait at a place outside the village where the commodities to be exchanged were brought down from the village.[73] Due

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70. Lt.-Colonel J. Shakespear, *The Lushei Kuki Clans*, p.17

71. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas*, Asiatic Researches, Volume 7, p.184

72. ibid, p.196

73. ibid, p.196

to constant wars among the chiefs of different clans, the Kukis always chose the "steepest and most inaccessible hills" to build their villages upon. Every village, which they call Parah or Khooah, used to have about four to five hundred families. Their villages were invariably fortified further by erecting bamboo palisade around the village and all routes leading to the village were strictly guarded by armed men, day and night.[74]

Betrayal with the Kukis in economic dealings, especially salt, would be fatal. In January 1850, an attack was made by about 400 Kukis on a Chakma village on the Chingnia river, a tributary of the Karnafuli. British investigation found out that the attack on the Kalindi Rani's people was due to "frauds practised on them when trying to barter their hill produce for salt and other articles brought from the plains."[75]

Theft or seizure of salt by rival chief was never tolerated. In July 1877 hostilities broke out between the eastern Chiefs, Lengkam, Lalbura, Chunglen, and Bungte, and the western Chiefs, Sookjpilal, Khalgom, his son, Lenpoonga. These hostilities originated in a dispute about some joom land. Towards the end of September, Lengkam attacked Khalgom, and carried off fifteen heads, in revenge for the theft from some of

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74. ibid, p.186

75. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.337

his people of some salt which they were carrying through Khalgom's country from Sonai Bazaar.[76]

Salt was such a precious item that when the Kukis cut off their enemies they would "carry nothing away from the slain but their heads, and such salt as they may have with them."[77]

The Kukis used to receive larger supply of precious salt due to their greater social and commercial intercourse with the Chakmas. The more powerful Banjoogee chief extracted an annual tribute of salt from the two neighbouring Kookie chiefs, Thandon and Mankene.[78]

Apart from salt, the Kukis also had extraordinary lust for fire-arms. It is stated that the Raja of the Chakmas lived in their immediate neighbourhood and due to fear of the Kookies he kept a number of men with fire-arms to guard his palace and villages. But that did not deter the Kookies to launch attacks in the Chakma Raja's territory and as a result "*his people have been obliged to abandon several places, by the depredations committed by the Kookies.*" The Chakma Raja had established good terms with some of the Kookie chiefs but in the course of their migrations, these friendly chiefs would be

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76. ibid, p.321

77. John Macrae, *Account of the Kookies, or Lunctas*, Asiatic Researches, Volume 7, p.197

78. ibid, p.188

succeeded by some others that the Chakma Raja knew nothing of, and of whose approach even he was ignorant until his people were cut off![79]

[79]. ibid, p.197

CHAPTER 5

RELATIONS AFTER ANNEXATION OF THE LUSHAI HILLS

1

AFTER THE British colonized the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1860, they started fragmenting the Chakma kingdom into several parts by adopting diverse policies. The very first initiative was to create the Mong Raja by taking away 653 square miles area from Kalindi Rani's northern territory bordering Hill Tippera. An influential leader of the Palaingtha Maghs namely Keoja Sain who held some zamindary in the plains was recognized as the third Raja in the Chittagong Hill

Tracts by the British Crown.[80] This whole tract of 653 square miles been originally populated by the Chakmas but later occupied by the Tipperahs and the Palaingthas Maghs when deserted by the Chakmas due to fear of raids by the Lushais[81] but all these tribes were subjects of Kalindi Rani. This was clarified in July 1898 by W.B. Oldham, Commissioner of Chittagong Division who admitted that:

> "After the formation of the Hill Tracts in 1860, their northern section was found to be a mere detached portion of Hill Tippera, in which there was no head and no referee. It was nominally Chakma land, but the Chakma Chieftainess lived too far away to control it. The most respectable and substantial inhabitant was Mong Raja Keoja Sain, a Mag who held a zamindari in the adjoining plains, and he was chosen its referee, and for the sake of administrative convenience, was considerably aggrandized by the authorities, and his nickname of Raja made use of till he became the sarbarahkar for a considerable portion of the tract".[82]

Superintendent of the CHT, R.H. Sneyd Hutchinson also justified the bifurcation of Kalindi Rani's kingdom

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80. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.12

81. *Selections*, p.77

82. ibid, pp.275-276

by stating: "*Though nominally the northern section belonged to the Chakma Chief, yet owing to the distances there was no control over the people, and great inconvenience was experienced by the absence of any head to whom reference could be made when occasion arose.*"[83]

At that time, the Chakma seat was at Rajanagar in Rangunia (presently under Chittagong District, Bangladesh) and Kalindi Rani used to rule her vast kingdom from there through her Dewans without any problem. The British falsely accused her of ineffective control over the northern areas and bifurcated her kingdom without any consultation. All the petty settlements including of the Chakma Dewans were handed over to Keoja Sein who himself was a subject of Kalindi Rani. Kalindi Rani challenged the decision before the higher authorities but to no avail. Many petitions were also submitted by local settlement holder, Nakool Chunder to the government against Keoja Sein's settlements but these were also brushed aside.

The main motive of the British policy was to cut Kalindi Rani down to size. The other motive was to reward Keoja Sein who, according to Captain Graham, Superintendent of the CHT, "behaved exceedingly well in the matter of coolies and had it not been for his assistance, the expedition would have been very badly

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83. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.12

off for carriage" while Kalindi Rani "complained bitterly" during the "Kookie expedition" of 1861.[84] Hence, to achieve both the objectives in one go, the British thought best policy was to create a third paramount power in "the Mong Raja" and increase his "influence and position" among the Joomeahs.[85]

The hostilities between the British and Kalindi Rani increased after an ambitious young officer of 27 years Captain T.H. Lewin was sent to the Chittagong Hill Tracts as Superintendent in April 1866 (two years later the designation was changed to Deputy Commissioner). He was given full powers of a magistrate to try criminal, civil and revenue cases. Soon Captain Lewin realized that "the real rulers" were the three paramount Chiefs and decided to "crush and extinguish the influence of these chiefs"[86] to show them that "my power was greater than theirs".[87] The arrogant style of Captain Lewin's functioning worked to tame the Bohmong Raja and the Mong Raja to some extent but not Kalindi Rani, the Chakma Queen Regnant. Such was her resistance that the aged Rani even refused to see Lewin personally even once during

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84. *Selections*, p.6

85. ibid, p.28

86. John Whitehead, *Thangliena: A life of T.H. Lewin*, Paul Strachan Kiscadale, 1992, p.159

87. Lewin, *A Fly on the Wheel,* p.207

her lifetime (she died in 1873). The Chakma tradition remembers the Rani of having rejected Lewin's request for an interview saying that she did not want to see a monkey's face. Although Captain Lewin himself does not mention of any such humiliation in his memoire he writes that the Rani's "attitude remained persistently hostile during the whole term of my residence in the Hill Tracts."[88] In his memoir, Lewin also calls the Chakma Queen Regnant as "always the ever-truculent and irreconcilable Rani"[89] Lewin's official biographer John Whitehead describes Kalindi Rani as "Lewin's implacable enemy".[90]

Lewin served in the CHT till 1873.[91] During his stint his wholesome approach was to injure the interests of Kalindi Rani, and hence as Deputy Commissioner with the support from his friend Gordon Young, the Chittagong Divisional Commissioner, Lewin settled all the small independent settlements that had lapsed within the Kalindi Rani country with the Mong Rajah

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88. ibid, p.217

89. ibid, p.251

90. Kabita Chakma, *The lands of Kalindi Rani*, Himal Southasian, July 2011 issue, available online at https://old.himalmag.com/component/content/article/4531-the-lands-of-kalindi-rani.html

91. Captain Lewin was absent from the Chittagong Hill Tracts for two years from January 1869 to January 1971 when he was forced to return to England on sick leave

in the year 1867.[92]

It had been the custom of the Chakmas that wherever the tribesmen may joom they would require to pay tax to the Chakma Raja. When created, the Mong Raja area had a population of 31,891, including 6,180 Chakmas, who were the subjects of the Chakma Rani.[93] To prevent Kalindi Rani from exercising control or collecting taxes from her tribesmen residing within the Mong Raja, Captain Lewin proposed creating four "Revenue Divisions" with definite geographical limits, one each under the three Chiefs and one Khas Mehal under the Deputy Commissioner, for jooming and capitation-tax purposes.[94] It is true that in 1862 itself then Superintendent Captain Graham had floated the idea of giving a definite area to each Chief where he/she could demand tax from all persons cultivating within his limits.[95] Kalindi Rani and, after her death in 1873, her successor Raja Harish Chandra Roy vociferously protested against the creation of the Mong Raja. Even the local Chakma head, Girish Chandra

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92. "Report on the capitation tax revenue settlements of the Chittagong Hill Tracts" dated 10th October 1867 submitted by Captain T.H. Lewin, Deputy Commissioner, Chittagong Hill Tracts. *Selections*, p.20

93. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.27

94. *Selections*, p.30

95. ibid, p.23

Dewan who was said to be more powerful than the Mong Raja refused to be under the Mong Raja saying that it would be "loss of dignity" to be under an inferior Chief. The Chakma Dewan told the British Government that he "fully acknowledges the supremacy of Raja Hurrish Chunder (= Raja Harish Chandra Roy)" and that "he would never voluntarily obey any other chief [who is] not a Chuckmah (= Chakma)."[96] The Chakmas had always lamented the creation of the Mong Circle by apportioning the Chakma kingdom. In July 1898, OB Oldham, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division stated, "*The Chakmas are the most numerous and powerful, as they are the most intelligent, of all the hill people of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. It was their Chief alone who contended for the powers and freedom.....their Chief and his Dewans claimed to be bound by no geographical limits, and to exercise full authority over their tribesmen, and the right and power to take poll-tax from them whether these tribes went to Hill Tippera or into the Chittagong district, or, as Lord Ulick Browne pointed out in 1869, to Calcutta.*"[97] In a letter dated 15 May 1925 to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division, the Deputy Commissioner of CHT, C.G.B Stevens, ICS, stated, "*The Chakma Chief [Bhuvan Mohan Roy] always maintains that the Mong Chief should not exist, and that the settlement for his people should have been made with Rani Kalindi, and would*

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96. ibid, p.102

97. ibid, p.277

have been had not she been on such bad terms with Captain Lewin."[98]

In 1876, Chakma Raja Harish Chandra Roy claimed jurisdiction of his territory in the following manner: "*Within the tract of country lying between the Kaptai (a tributary of the Koornafoolee) on the south and the Fenny on the north, the Kooki country on the east and the boundary of the Hill Tracts on the west, the ryots of your petitioner have been jooming from time immemorial.*"[99] This statement was made by the Raja in the context of division of the whole of Chittagong Hill Tracts into four Revenue Circles namely Mong Raja's Circle, Chakma Raja's Circle, Bohmong Raja's Circle and the Deputy Commissioners' Khas Mehal, thereby fragmenting the territories of the Chakma Raja.[100] The Khas Mehal comprised of all country under British influence to the east of Burkul (Barkal) range on the Karnaphuli river (leading to Hill Tipperah) and Saichul range (leading down to Arakan).[101] In other words, the Khas Mehal included Demagiri and Uipum hill ranges which were within the boundary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts demarcated vide notification of the Government of Bengal dated the 30th June 1879. By this notification the eastern

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98. ibid, p.503

99. ibid, p.109

100. ibid, p.69

101. ibid, p.53

"inner line" of the CHT was demarcated under section 2 of the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation I of 1873 in the following manner:

> "This line of boundary commences at the hill station marked S, south of Belting Sib 2284, on the Jampoi range of hills forming the Hill Tipperah eastern frontier; it then runs along the whole course of the "Tulenpui" or "Sujjuk" River to its junction with the Karnafuli River, a little north of Demagiri; thence it continues eastward along this stream up to the junction of the "Tui Chong" River, after which it follows the whole course of this river to a point immediately to the south-east of the hill station of the Ohipum No. 6; then turning westwards, crosses the Ohipum range of hills, and joins the Thega Khali at a point midway between the hill stations of Saichal, Nos. 2 and 3, after which it follows the course of the Thega Khall River to its source; then again turns south-westwards and follows the water-shed of the Weybong range of hills, until it meets the southern hill station of Keokradong on the south-eastern boundary of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, following the water-shed until it meets the frontier that portion of the Arracan Hill Tracts in which order and regularity are maintained."[102]

By this notification dated the 30th June 1879, it is clear

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[102]. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.397

that the station of Demagiri and the area which is now the Chakma Autonomous District Council were within the Chittagong Hill Tracts and part of the Chakma Circle.

Raja Harish Chandra Roy objected to the boundary of "Chakma Circle" being reduced arbitrarily on the north and the east because of formation of Mong Raja and Khas Mehal under the Government. He claimed to "extend his people much farther north in the Chingree and Kassalong valleys, and eastwards as far as the Sirthay and Uipum ranges."[103] In present geographical context, Sirthay is six miles upstream of Sajek river from Demagiri while Uipum hill ranges are the areas falling in the Chakma Autonomous District Council region. Following vehement protests by the Chakma Raja, the "Circle. No. 3.-Deputy Commissioner's khas mehal" which included Demagiri and Uipum hills ranges was restored to the Chakma Raja in 1892.[104] In 1911, the deforested parts of the Mainy Valley including the Sajek areas were also restored to the Chakma Raja.[105] Since 1892, when the British introduced territorial jurisdiction for the CHT Rajas, the Chakma Raja received jum tax from "Tripuras, Maghs, and Kukis", apart from his own tribe, living

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103. *Selections*, p.77

104. ibid, p.226

105. ibid, p.498

within the Chakma Circle.[106]

Therefore, when discussions were being held to transfer Demagiri and neighboring areas from the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bengal) to the Lushai Hills (Assam) it was clarified by then Chief Commissioner of Assam on 17th July 1897 that "*The station of Demagiri is not situated within the present area of the South Lushai Hills. It is topographically within the area of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. But, under Sir Charles Eliott's [Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal] orders, passed in 1892, it was declared that, for administrative purposes, Demagiri should be considered to be part and parcel of the South Lushai Hills*".[107] This transfer was effected on 1st April 1898 and the North Lushai Hills, the South Lushai Hills and the areas so transferred from the Chakma Circle were amalgamated to form unified Lushai Hills district under Assam and placed under a Superintendent. In consequence of this transfer of the eastern strip of the Chakma Circle, the Chakma Raja had to forego some of his land and subjects, including Chakmas, Riangs, Kukis, Bonjogis and Pankhoo who had been inhabiting beyond the eastern banks of rivers Thega Khal and Bur Harina Khal. The Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 10, stated, "*The boundaries were revised, and a strip on the east,*

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106. ibid, p.503

107. Sir Robert Reid, *History of the Frontier Areas Bordering on Assam 1883-1941*, Eastern Publishing House, Delhi, 1983, p.40

including Demagiri with a population of about 1,500, was transferred to the Lushai Hills."[108] Thus, Chakmas became the natural residents or natives of the Lushai Hills since 1898 following the transfer of their ancestral territories to the Lushai Hills by the British.

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THE British Crown annexed the South Lushai Hills in 1891. After the transfer of Demagiri and neighbouring areas, the British tried to allay the concerns of the Chakma Raja. The letter of Sir Henry John Stedman Cotton, then Chief Commissioner of Assam, dated 19th October 1898 to the Chakma Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy, stated, "*We cannot prohibit your people from entering the Lushai Hills but have no wish to offer them any inducement to do so.*"[109] After annexation of the Lushai Hills, the British Government was not in favour of pursuing a policy of population transfer of non-Mizo tribes like Chakmas because they were no longer at war with the Mizos who were completely subjugated. This policy should be put in the context of inducements given by the British to the Kuki tribes to migrate northwards to

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108. *Imperial Gazetteer of India, Volume 10*, p.323

109. A copy of this letter written by Sir Henry John Stedman Cotton dated 19th October 1898 to the Chakma Raja Bhuban Mohan Roy is available with the author

act as buffer between the North Cachar and the hostile Angami Nagas who had continuously raided upon the British territories and subjects. In 1856-57, lands were given free of rent for 10 years and afterwards for 25 years to any Kuki who was willing to settle to the east of North Cachar beyond the Langting River and fire-arms and ammunition were also provided to them by the British Government. This led to establishment of about 1,067 colonies of Kukis by 1867 when the scheme was discontinued following establishment of the Naga Hills District.[110]

By Rules of 1892 relating to the administration of the CHT, Bohmong, Chakma and Mong Rajas lost authority over their respective tribesmen residing outside their Circles. On 16th September 1899, the Chief Secretary to the Government of Bengal stated that the Lieutenant-Governor of Bengal ordered that the Rules of 1892 be strictly followed and for any departure the officer in charge of the Hill Tracts would be held responsible.[111] By January 1905, more than one-third of the whole area of the CHT district was notified as "forest reserves" where no *juming* was allowed.[112] Hence, jum land became scarce particularly in the Chakma Circle whose population was largest.

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110. Alexander Mackenzie, *The North-East Frontier of India*, p.146

111. *Selections*, p.304

112. ibid, p.306

Availability of fertile forests within the South Lushai Hills and the personal freedom to migrate to other places under Rules of 1892 encouraged the Chakma ryots to migrate to the Lushai Hills and Hill Tipperah in search of livelihood. There had been cross border migration of other tribes too, including of Tipperahs/Reangs and Lushais.

Prior to 1898, the Chakmas living on the fringes used to come up the rivers of Karnaphuli, Thega and Harina to take down large logs (to make country boats), bamboo, cane etc. "Dug-out" country boats or canoes were of great demand in Bengal and along with bamboo rafts, these dug-outs constituted the principal means of transport on all the rivers. "*The trade of the Hill Tracts is principally in the hands of Chittagonian Bengalis, who convey their goods from place to place by means of boats and rafts.*"[113] The principal exports consisted of forest produce such as cotton, rice, oil-seeds (mustard and rape) and rough "dug-outs" which were subsequently converted into boat or canoe "which is in universal use on all the rivers of the district and provides the principal means of transport".[114] Hence, selling of "dug-outs" or canoes was a profitable business and Chakma tribals when they were not engaged in Jhum

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113. R.H.S. Hutchinson, *An Account of the Chittagong Hill Tracts*, p.44

114. ibid, p.44

cultivation used to come to the jungles of the Lushai Hills in search of large logs to make "dug-outs". This enterprise was not without danger. Journal, *The Gentleman's Magazine,* in its January to June 1894 issue mentioned that "*The Chakmas, who live in the hills nearer to Chittagong, go into the forests in the rainy season to cut timber for boats. Large rafts are floated down stream (of Karnafuli river) to Chittagong, composed of logs of large size, as well as bamboo. Quantities of cane are also brought down. Instances occur of the Chakmas being attacked by the savage Lushais, and their heads being taken.*"[115] Many Chakmas who came for this purpose also *jhumed* the forests within the Lusahai Hills and permanently settled there with their families.

British records say that a total of 128 Chakma families migrated to the South Lushai Hills in 1893.[116] These could be in search of better livelihood (jhums). The migration of the Chakmas increased by the turn of the nineteenth century. In September 1904, Mr L.E.B. Cobden-Ramsay, Officiating Superintendent of the Chittagong Hill Tracts stated that during 1894-95 to 1903-04, a total of 604 families emigrated from

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115. *The Gentleman's Magazine, Vol. CCLXXVI*, January to June 1894, p.237

116. "Annual General Administration Report of the Chittagong Division for the year 1894-95" submitted by WB Oldham, Commissioner of the Chittagong Division to Government of Bengal, dated 29.6.1895, published in Supplement to the Calcutta Gazettee, October 2, 1895, p.2057

Chakma Raja's Circle.[117] Although the destinations of these emigrants were not mentioned, it is clear that these Chakma families went in search of good jum lands (forests) which were available at that time in the Hill Tipperah and the Lushai Hills. Later in March 1915, Mr Owen Mawson, Superintendent of the CHT stated that Chakma Chief had sought a remission of 5 per cent to cover cases of non-recovery of rent owing to "a large number of his Jhumias are leaving for Hill Tippera and Lushai Hills on account of discovery of good jhoom land (there)".[118] In March 1915, Mr Owen Mawson further informed to the Commissioner of the Chittagong Division that a total of 133 families had emigrated from Chakma Raja's Circle to the Lushai Hills during 1904-05 to 1913-14.[119]

Chakmas were also brought by the Lushai Hills authorities to facilitate forest extraction. In 1938, Lushai Hills Superintendent McCall recorded that there had been a tendency to facilitate the import of Chakmas and other tribes, who lived in the low foot-hills, into the border areas within the Lushai Hills to broaden chances of forest extractions.[120] With the help

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117. *Selections*, p.321

118. ibid, p.341

119. ibid, p.344

120. Major A G McCall, *The Lushai Hills District Cover*, Maranatha Printing Press, Aizawl, 1980, p.195

of the Chakmas, the authorities used to ascertain the origin of timbers within the Karnaphuli river south of the Boraharina Mukh. The reason was that unlike the Lushais, the Chakma were very good boatmen and they could effectively navigate the boats in the Karnaphuli river which had dangerous rapids at several places. "Demagiri is a very long way from Borkal the first trading centre encountered on the way down the Karnaphuli to Chittagong. There are, moreover, dangerous rapids to be encountered. Most of the traders and cutters are therefore men from Chittagong Hill Tracts," McCall recorded in *The Lushai Hills District Cover.*[121]

Chakmas and Mizos had friendly relationship since 1898 when the new Lushai Hills district took shape. There is no evidence to prove otherwise. Even the Mizoram government has stated that the Lushai Chiefs had always welcomed the Chakmas "with open arms".[122]

It is pertinent to mention that the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation, 1873, or Inner Line Regulation, was extended to the Lushai Hills only in 1933, by a notification no. 2106 A.P. dt 9.3.1933.[123] The

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[121]. ibid, p.198

[122]. Response of Mizoram Government, Home Department to the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) dated 10th April 2015 in NHRC Case No. 9/16/0/2014

Governor-General in Council by a notification No. 2107 A.P. dt 9.3.1933 prohibited entry into the Lushai Hills without a pass for all persons other than the officers on government duty, foreigners who had been permitted to reside in the Lushai Hills district and the indigenous inhabitants of the district.[124] The Chakmas being indigenous hillmen were kept outside the purview of this order, as later succinctly clarified by KGR Iyer, Deputy Commissioner of Mizo District on 27th October 1955 who stated, "As the Chakmas are treated as Scheduled Tribe just like any Lushai or Mizo tribe *they were allowed free entry into this District without passes* before the introduction of Indo-Pakistan Passport system but they were not, however, allowed to settle without a pass."[125] (emphasis added). Hence, there was no requirement for the Chakmas to take entry passes unlike the non-tribals such as Nepalis and Bengalis to enter into the Lushai Hills even after introduction of

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123. When the Bengal Eastern Frontier Regulation was extended to the Lushai Hills for the first time in 1930 only the inner line for the northern boundary of Lushai Hills was prescribed vide notification No. 9102 A.P. dt.28.8.1930, see P. Chakraborty, *Mizoram Compendium of Laws, Vol. I*, Linkman Publication, 1990, p.13

124. P. Chakraborty, *Mizoram Compendium of Laws, Vol. I*, Linkman Publication, 1990, p.14

125. Letter of Shri K.G.R Iyer, IAS, Deputy Commissioner, Mizo District to the Secretary to the Government of Assam for Tribal Affairs, vide No. GP.21/55/56 dated Aijal the 27th October 1955

the Inner Line Regulation. In *The Lushai Hills District Cover,* compiled by Superintendent McCall in around 1938-39 (which received official recognition from the Secretary to the Governor of Assam vide his memo no. 4720 g.s. dt. 7-11-1938), it was stated that "*The settlement of Chakmas, Tripuris or Nepalis is prohibited except with the permission of Superintendent, Lushai Hills which, if given at all should normally be confined to authorizing settlement at main existing Lushai village site. Permission for such settlement in Lungleh given by the Sub-Divisional Officer, Lungleh should in all cases be submitted for approval by Superintendent, Lushai Hills.*"[126] It must be singularly pointed out that the restriction upon the Chakmas was for settlement only, not entry into the Lushai Hills. Such a restriction on settlement without permission was a mere administrative necessity because of the fact that the CHT and the Lushai Hills were under two different administrations (the former being under Bengal and the latter under Assam). Therefore, it was mandatory for the Chakmas coming from the CHT to take prior permission from the Sub Divisional Officer at Lunglei or the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills for settling down permanently. It was the rule of that time that the British subjects of any community needed permission even for shifting from one chief to another chief's territory in the Lushai Hills and from one Raja to another in the CHT. The main objective of this policy was to uphold the authority of the Chief/Raja and to

126. Major A G McCall, *The Lushai Hills District Cover*, p.72

keep check over the British subjects so that no body defaulted from paying taxes after migration. Secondly, the rule imposed on the Chakmas was that they were required to settle down within the territory of a Lushai Chief's village with the permission of that Chief. This was meant to keep law and order and maintenance of cordial relationship between the dominant Lushai tribes and the minority non-Lushai tribes.

In 1933, a Chakma group leader named Debicharan Chakma was allowed by the Sub Divisional Officer of Lungleh, with the approval from the Superintendent of the Lushai Hills, to establish a separate village for his people at Lokisuri vide Order No. 4 of 1933-34 dated Lungleh 16th May, 1933. Debicharan Chakma and after his death, his son, ruled over Lokisuri village like their Mizo counterparts, until chieftainship was abolished in 1954. When chieftainship was abolished under "The Assam Lushai Hills (Acquisition of Chiefs' Rights) Act, 1954, Debicharan's son, Lambomani alias Laloneny Chakma received compensation amounting to Rs 3,840.[127] Besides him, there were two other Chakma chiefs namely Soroda Chakma, chief of Uiphum; and Purboroy Chakma, chief of Serlui who were also compensated by the Assam Government along with 309 chiefs across the Lushai Hills.[128]

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127. Ibid

128. Government of Assam, Notification No. TAD/11/103/52(a) dt. 23rd March 1955

On 29 April 1946, British Superintendent of Lushai Hills A. Macdonald passed an order (Order No. 734-47G dated 29th April 1946) to designate several minority tribes namely "Pawi, Paihte, Hmar, Lakher, Chakma, Riang (Tuikuk), Matu, Chawrai, Hrangkhawl, Langrawng" at par with the Lushais "for the purpose of House Tax assessment", and ordered that with effect from the assessment year 1946-47, these above-named tribes "will pay House Tax at the same rate as if they were Lushais" and therefore, reiterated the British policy to consider these above-named tribes as natives of the Lushai Hills at par with the Lushais. When the Constitution of India come into force on 26th January 1950, some 15,897 Chakmas residing in the Lushai Hills (as per Census 1951[129]) became the citizens of India and natives of the Lushai Hills, renamed as Mizoram since 1972. They were recognized as Scheduled Tribes of Mizoram under the Constitution (Scheduled Tribes) Order 1950 notified by the President of India. In 1953, the Lushai Hills Autonomous District Council laid down rules regarding collection of taxes called the Lushai Hills District Council (Revenue Assessment) Regulation, 1953 under which the Chakmas being natives were required to pay Rs 2 at par with the Lushais/Mizos and other indigenous tribes.[130] This is merely a codification

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129. ibid, p.419

130. Tribal Research Institute of Mizoram, *The Tribes of Mizoram: A Dissertation*, 1994, p.94

of an earlier order passed by Mr Macdonald by the Assam Government of independent India.

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The contours of academic discourse relating to the Chakma-Mizo relations or connections are not only confusing but also often misleading. A lot has been written about the Chakma and Mizo communities separately but not them together. Did they have any social, political, economic and military relations in the past? If yes, how old and how deep were these relations? This book answers these questions.

Paritosh Chakma is a well-known name among the Chakma community in India. He is an independent researcher, with deep interests in history.

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